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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

THESIS

THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE AMERICAN VILLAGE

by

BARBARA BLANCHARD

(B.S. in Ed., Boston University , 1941)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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PREFACE

The village to be dealt with in the following discussion is not a place of definite population, noted by its number of modern improvements, nor typed by its occupations. The size of the town will range from small Greenford to large-sized South; the occupations vary from coal-mining to farming; social life may consist of bicycle parties in the evening or local dances. The village may be in the era of automobiles. The village may be in the heart of London still, or of the village. The village may be on a mountain side in Vermont, or near an industrial center in Illinois.

from "The Gospel of Beauty"

by

Vachel Lindsay

That "There is some bad in the best of us" is an old adage and - quite possibly - true. The small town has its share of "bad", but the good qualities do work to overcome the bad. The village is certain to live on as a symbol of friendly democracy. Randolph S. Bourne says, "An American town - large enough to contain a fairly complete representation of the different types of people and social organization and classes, and yet not so large that individualities are submerged in the general mass, or the line between the classes blurred and made indistinct, is a real epitome of American life."¹

1. Randolph S. Bourne "The Social Order in an American Town" Sat. R. L. A. v 8:613 (Mar. 26, 1932)



"Let not our town be large, remembering
That little Athens was the Muses' home,
That Oxford rules the heart of London still,
That Florence gave the Renaissance to Rome."

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from "The Gospel of Beauty"

by

Michael Lindsay

PREFACE

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For an analysis of the " Village Controversy ", it is better that the authors be considered not chronologically but from the standpoint of their position. In this discussion, the attack by Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis will precede the defense by William Allen White, Newton Booth Tarkington, and Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Actually the defenders had not waited for the attack for White and Tarkington had been defending the village for over twenty years before the attack reached its peak. With the treatment of the subject thus compactly organized, an objective analysis may be made of the representative authors. Through them, the village will either retain its reputation as a friendly democracy or sink to the level of a virus.

This is by no means an exhaustive study of the subject; that would have been impossible in a paper of this scope. However a sincere effort has been made to select those books which will most represent the " Controversy over the American Village ".

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The small town has long played an important role in our American literature. Captain John Smith, one of our earliest American writers, touched on the theme in 1608 in True Relations, a description of the Jamestown colony. The Journals of Governor Winthrop and Governor Bradford, whether intentionally or not, displayed the "village" in all its glory - and sometimes degradation even though, "The first settlements, towns, or colonies founded by the Pilgrims, or on the banks of a river as an approximation of a compact community, gave them but the vague promise of an indigenous life."¹ During the 18th century, the village was enlarged upon in the Goldsmithian style, and generally in poetry, descriptive of the standardized village with its church, its school-house, its community life. This type of literature culminated in The American Village (1772) of Philip Freneau, widely acclaimed as a poet.

PART I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

OF THE

BATTLE OF THE VILLAGE

Freneau's purpose was to "describe the village, rising on the green, its harmless people, born to small command, lost in the bosom of this western land."² At the turn of the century the pastoral village was presented as an American Utopia by one of the "Hartford Wits" Timothy Dwight, author of our first long "small town" poem, intended Greenfield Hill as a revelation of the glory and sweetness to be found in his Connecticut town. That Dwight

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1. Herron, John S. The Small Town in American Literature, ed. W. Patterson, p. 44. The Poems of Philip Freneau, Journal of the American Revolution, 1772, 1773, 1774, 1775.

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1. Herron, Ina H. The Small Town in American Literature, p.8

2. Pattee, F.L. ed. The Poems of Philip Freneau, Poet of the American Revolution III, p.382 ff.

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failed in presenting a " revelation " to America does not alter the fact that the small town was still a matter for literary endeavor. In fact, Dwight's Greenfield Hill, the scene of unbelievable enterprise, democracy, economy and happiness, may be considered as a general description of the towns and villages of New England; those only excepted, which are either economical, new, or situated on barren soil." ³

The impression must not be given that all village literature upheld the small town. On the contrary, many were sensitive to the deficiencies, the faults, of the town. John Trumball, a member of the Hartford Wits who attempted to place literary style and content on a higher scale, burlesqued in poetry the New England town meeting as an extravagant absurdity where the town fathers, "----met, made speeches full long-winded.

Resolved, protested and rescinded." ⁴

M'Fingal was widely read, thus throwing further light on the town as a topic in American literature.

James Fenimore Cooper and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were outstanding in their portrayal of the small town. The Pioneers (1823), by Cooper, is a study (as Richard Henry Dana Sr. remarked in a letter to the author) " of a newly settled village in a new country. Such motley company huddled together, yet all distinctly marked and individual, and everyone as busy as can be as always is the case in such a place." ⁵

3. Herron, op.cit. p.39

4. Trumball, John M'Fingal, p.21

5. Herron, op.cit., p.163

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Longfellow's Kavanaugh (1849) is impressionistic in its political views on the town of New England.

After the Civil War, travel rapidly became an important factor in American life. The frontier was pushed Westward to the Pacific, new lands were opened up, great opportunities became known. Yet despite the wide travel, the literature was obviously local, each author presenting the local color of his special community, sincerely proud of the home-town. Of the local colorists, Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman are considered precursors of the "defense of the village" movement.

At the same time, the growing power of machinery was threatening the independence of the individual. Men long accustomed to self-sufficiency were pessimistically bowing to the domination of industry. The trend in literature echoed the economic trend.

Naturalism of a socialistic and psychological type became rampant, and the small town received its share of dissection. Stephen Crane revealed the erudition of small town life in all its nakedness. But the advent of Edgar Watson Howe into the literary world had a startling effect which culminated in the vituperative work of Edgar Lee Masters. Howe's The Story of a Country Town (1883), according to Carl Van Doren in his Many Minds, "broke a pattern and shouldered its way among the fragments." ⁶ The dreary village life of the late nineteenth century Midwest is revealed

6. Herron, op. cit. p.209

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frankly and with sardonic humor." While Miss Jewitt was still writing in kindly manner about quiet New England villages, Howe was exposing an entirely different order of town life ---. It [his work] lacked the traditional glorification of village virtues. Instead it grimly portrayed the most unpromising of small town living conditions ----- . With bluntness of language, Howe contemptuously presented the men of his town as overbearing, argumentative, and exacting, yet woefully futile and discontented ---. Lacking positive opinions of their own, they were nevertheless full of self-conceit over their petty affairs." ⁷

Mark Twain continued the vicious onslaught against village tradition in The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg (1899) " a melancholy record of the effect of greed on the ordinary amenities of life." ⁸ The meanness and hypocrisy of a supposedly incorruptible village are uncovered for the public eye to see.

In comparison with the effect upon the American literary realm of The Story of a Country Town , Edger Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology (1915) had the report of a bomb. The anthology lays bare the secrets of the village dead. as each villager speaks from his tomb. Masters himself tells the purpose of the anthology :

" the interwoven history of a whole community , a village, a city, or whatever you like to call it ----. I had a variety of things in mind in the writing of the anthology. I meant to

7. ibid , p.209

8. Blankenship, Russell American Literature , p.462

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"The interwoven history of a whole community, a village, a city, or whatever you like to call it. I had a variety of things in mind in the writing of the anthology. I meant to

analyze character, to satirize society, to tell a story, to expose the machinery of life, to present to view a working model of the big world and put it in a window where the passerby could stop and see it run. And I had in mind, too, the creation of beauty and the depiction of our sorrows and hopes, our religious failures, successes and visions, our poor little lives, rounded by sleep, in language, and figures emotionally tuned to bring all of us together in understanding and affection." ⁹

Masters revolts against all that is hypocritical in the village life. He tears down the veil of conventionality leaving bare the inner thoughts which often reek with sordidness. His work has done much toward disproving that small towns are indicative of happiness, honest thrift and virtue. The real effect of Masters' work was not seen at once, for it appeared at a time of great political and economic upheaval - the World War I. After the war, however, the theme was carried forth in the movement known as The Battle of the Village. The post-war period marked the removal (for the nonce) of economic and social problems thus removing the subject of the Naturalistic "problem" novels so prevalent before the war. But criticism was inbred in the "literaries" for no longer able to criticize political and social affairs, they turned at once to a criticism of the cultural life of the small village. Masters' Spoon River was the inspiration for many vituperative assaults on village life.

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Masters revokes against all that is hypocritical in the village life. He tears down the veil of conventionalism leaving bare the inner thoughts which often peak with selfishness. His work has done much toward disproving that small towns are indicative of happiness, honest thrift and virtue. The real effect of Masters' work was not seen at once, for it appeared at a time of great political and economic upheaval - the World War I. After the war, however, the theme was carried forth in the movement known as The Waste Land. The post-war period marked the removal (for the moment) of economic and social problems thus removing the subject of the "Naturalistic" problem "novels" to prevent before the war. But criticism was laid in the "literary" for no longer able to criticize political and social affairs, they turned at once to a criticism of the cultural life of the small village. Masters' Spoon River was the inspiration for many viviparous assaults on village life.

This new type of criticism was psychological in its subject, naturalistic in its treatment. Our traditional Puritanism was discovered to be narrow-minded puritanism; thrift was displayed as stinginess ; respectability in the eyes of the attackers became merely superficial conformity, not virtue; the good-fellowship was presented as back-slapping joviality; "folksiness " was one of the many forms of " nosyness "; the pioneer spirit of optimism had degenerated into a blatant "defense mechanism".

" But the chief criticism was leveled at dullness,' the village virus'. The pioneer had assiduously uprooted from his society every vestige of aristocracy, but no upper class trait was more relentlessly exterminated than was that of independence of thought. Lacking the secure sanction of name and family tradition for his thinking, the pioneer instinctively sought sanction in the solidarity of his group. Few ideas and speculations were tolerated that could not gain the understanding approval of the mass. This fact caused the intellectual life of the village to settle on a rather low level. The ambitious and the intellectually restless left the small town for the city. The cultural centers of the East were all well acquainted with the 'back trailers' of the middle border', and the left bank of the Seine knew a few of the most adventurous. But the home villages slumbered on generation after generation with little sign of change." 10

The critics of the post-war era were H.L. Mencken, Jean

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"But the chief criticism was leveled at business," the village voice. The pioneer had rashly and unwisely uprooted from his society every vestige of aristocracy, and no upper class trait was more relatively exterminated than was that of independence of thought. Denying the secure sanction of mass and family tradition for his thinking, the pioneer instinctively sought sanction in the solidarity of his group. New ideas and speculations were tolerated that could not gain the understanding approval of the mass. This lack caused the intellectual life of the village to settle on a rather low level. The ambitious and the intellectually restless left the small town for the city. The cultural centers of the West were all well acquainted with the 'back trails' of the middle border, and the left bank of the St. Lawrence knew a few of the most adventurous. But the home villages slumbered on generation after generation with little sign of change." 10

The critics of the post-war era were H.L. Mencksen, Jean

Nathan, Ludwig Lewisohn, Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks. Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson, the most famous for their attack on the village, are to be discussed later.

The defenders of the village are really misnamed for they had been writing in praise of the village long before the attackers gained the wide attention of the public. American fiction had symbolized the village as " the natural home of the pleasant virtues ". True enough, the farm had often been attacked as a place of perpetual and non-progressive rusticism, but even those daring writers dared not lay " disrespectful hands " upon the village. "It seemed too cosy a microcosm to be disturbed. There it lay in the mind's eye, neat, compact, organized, traditional, the white church its tapering spire, the sober schoolhouse, the smithy of the ringing anvil, the corner grocery, the cluster of friendly houses; the venerable parson, the wise physician, the canny squire, the grasping landlord, softened or outwitted in the end; the village belle, gossip, atheist, idiot; jovial fathers, gentle mothers, merry children; cool parlors, shining kitchens, spacious barns, lavish gardens, fragrant summer dawns, and comfortable winter evenings. These were images not to be discarded lightly -----." ¹¹

Thus was the small town presented, by Riley, by Meredith Nicholson, by Zona Gale. The chief adherents to the defense movement, William Allen White, Booth Tarkington, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, are to be discussed later.

PART II

THE ATTACK

Order of Books

1. Winesburg, Ohio (1919)

2. Tar, A Midwest Childhood
(1926)

PART II

THE ATTACK

SHERWOOD ANDERSON

The revolt from the village in American fiction began essentially with Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology (1915). It is an expression of criticism of everything leaning toward the complacent, the optimistic, the sentimental. Spoon River is a revolt against the greed and expediency, the dullness and ugliness to be found underneath the cover of peace and contentment in the small town.

SHERWOOD ANDERSON

This theme was brought to a climax in the prose fiction of Sherwood Anderson. Like many other Midland writers, Anderson lived in the section of the country called the Order of Books

One of a large family, he drifted to Chicago in his teens where he became a laborer. After taking part in the Spanish American war, he tried job after job including advertising and managing a paint factory. His inability to find happiness and contentment in any job convinced him that such happiness as served his fellow Americans was not for him. He at last found self-expression in writing, through which he could set forth creative art and beauty. Contacts with Twain, Heckt and Will launched him on a literary career. Even in his first stories he showed his interest in the psychological aspects of life rather than plot; in the reality of passion and tragedy rather than conventions. In all of his stories he expresses his own conviction that " literature is not a means of escape from life; all good works of art take you back into

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON

The revolt from the village in American fiction began essentially with Edgar Poe Masters, Spoon River Anthology (1912). It is an expression of criticism of everything leaning toward the complacent, the optimistic, the sentimental. Spoon River is a poetic revelation of the greed and hypocrisy, the dullness and ugliness to be found underneath the cover of peace and contentment in the small town.

This theme was brought to a climax in the prose fiction of Sherwood Anderson. Like many other Midland writers, Anderson lived in the section of the country of which he writes. One of a large family, he drifted to Chicago in his teens where he became a laborer. After taking part in the Spanish-American war, he tried job after job including advertising and managing a paint factory. His inability to find happiness and contentment in any job convinced him that such happiness as awaited his fellow Americans was not for him. He at last found self-expression in writing, through which he could set forth creative art and beauty. Contacts with Dreiser, Heckt and Gill launched him on a literary career. Even in his first stories he showed his interest in the psychological aspects of life rather than plot; in the reality of passion and tragedy rather than conventions. In all of his stories he expresses his own conviction that "life is not a means of escape from life; all good works of art take you back into

your own life." ¹ Most of his stories and novels are about heroes who have the same thoughts as he. Men ought to be " full of vitality, full of beauty and heroism. Anderson went beyond the revolt from the village to an imaginative criticism of the whole American world." ² His warning was chiefly against over-surety and smugness in men's opinions.

Fred Lewis Pattee sums up Anderson in these words :

" Anderson is a paradox in our hopeful America, a literary agnostic, an intellectual hobo, a grown man still adolescent, an agitator with no program, a poet soul with no foundation, a romanticist turned cynic ---. Such men build no foundations. They stir the water to muddiness but they do nothing permanent." ³

Winesburg, Ohio was as familiar to Anderson as Spoon River was to Edgar Lee Masters. But Anderson's treatment of the village was not so vitriolic as Masters' had been. The central character in Winesburg, Ohio (1919) is George Willard, a young reporter about to leave his native town. He doesn't necessarily hate the village but feels cramped by its repressed life and would seek adventure and fame in a thriving metropolis. During the remainder of his time in Winesburg he discovers many " secrets " which explain sympathetically the actions of its inhabitants. The book contains a number of these " secrets " but the characters are so warped and scarred by handicaps within and without

1. Bond, George " Sherwood Anderson Chats about Books " Dallas Morning News mag.sec. p.3 (October 18, 1925).
2. Van Doran, Carl The American Novel p.298
3. Pattee, Fred L. The New American Literature p.337

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1. Bond, George "Sherwood Anderson Chats About Books" Delaware
Morning News mar. sec. p. 2 (October 18, 1928).
 2. Van Doren, Carl The American Novel p. 128
 3. Pattee, Fred L. The New American Literature p. 337

that they appear as the writer suggests , mere " grotesques of real life. "

Wing Biddlebaum was just such a grotesque. His poetic expressive handshad caused his discharge as school teacher in a Pennsylvania town. Not only was he discharged but he was chased from the village - a fierce vengeful mob at his heels - all because he expressed himself through the " caress in his fingers ". An idiot boy had dreamed horrible things of the teacher's hands and told the dream as a fact. ⁴

As Wing Biddlebaum represents a " distinguished figure " of the village, so Curtis Hartman represents its religion. Minister of the Presbyterian Church, he had developed an imposing congregation. Despite the lack of keen worship in his parish, he nevertheless had no enemies. Yet the sight of a woman so preyed on his mind that he changed from a pious son of God to a worshiper of the Devil. The result was his tumultuous speech to George Willard.

" The ways of God are beyond human understanding. I have found the Light. After ten years in this town, God has manifested himself to me in the body of a woman. She is an instrument of God, bearing the message of truth." ⁵ Thus Rev. Curtis Hartman prepared himself for spreading the word of God after the revelation, made manifest through the body of a Winesburg school teacher!

Many other pictures of Winesburg folk are offered, showing how the cramped atmosphere of the town is inductive to inhi-

4. Winesburg, Ohio " Hands " p.7 ff

5. ibid "The Strength of God " p.182

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body of a Winnebago school teacher!

Many other pictures of Winnebago folk are offered, showing
how the cramped atmosphere of the town is inclusive to indi-

bitions and morbid introspections. The hotel proprietor's unhappy wife, the middle aged doctor, the man of ideas, the telegraph operator who had been disillusioned in love; all are presented at a highly emotional moment so their very souls are laid bare to the reader. These people struggled as best they can to rise from their moral and intellectual decrepitude, but in the end sink back to their former passive state.

Tar, A Midwest Childhood (1926) is the story of Anderson's own childhood in a small Ohio town. It is a description of Tar Moorehead's life from four years of age to early adolescence. His father is lazy, garrulous and lovable, and a decided contrast to Tar's beautiful silent mother. The book is greatly concerned with the sex life of its characters, but as a young boy would see it. The repressed atmosphere of the town acts as a psychological incentive for Tar. He found from observation of his mother and father that in Winesburg "a woman, when she has kids, when her man isn't a good provider, gets the worst of it." Dick Moorehead was often invited out for meals, but Mary Moorehead stayed at home to eat bread soaked in drippings rather than spread with butter.

The whole town took much interest in the business controversy between Tar and Hog Hawkins. Hawkins did his best to cheat the boy of the two cents for the newspaper. Tar, in his understanding manner, permitted him to do so "when the

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action between Tar and Hog Hawkins. Hawkins did his best to
cheat the boy of the two cents for the newspaper. Tar, in his
understanding manner, permitted him to do so "when the

townsfolk wouldn't know. " Tar had seen the penny-pinching hog dealer one night praying his dead wife to say a good word in heaven for him that he might get there too. Tar's need for self- support had made him sensitive to the feelings of others and he understood the great loneliness in which Hawkins was living.⁶

The book is actually an introspective auto-biography and rural album of "coarse daguerreotypes illustrating the psychology, the manners, the view of life, the institutions, the personality of an area left behind by a retreating frontier."⁷

In spite of his sympathy towards the folk and place of his school, Anderson portrays them as being so far sunk in the quagmire of futility that they may never formulate articulately the desires that burn within them. It is the consciousness of innane desire that makes them uselessly reckless and spasmodic. Anderson himself is " constantly agitated by a suspicion that life has a meaning that has been concealed from him. He is baffled and worried about idealism, sex, beauty, truth, love, he tortures himself trying to find what it is that man should get out of life. " I am a lover," he wails, " and I have not found my thing to love---. I am a confused child in a confused world. " That in itself is a rather serious defect in a writer; frustrated lovers and confused children don't often see life in a wholly illuminating manner." ⁸

6. *ibid* p.309

7. *Pattee, The New American Literature* p.333

8. Chase, Cleveland " Sherwood Anderson" Sat. Review of Lit. 4:129-30 (Sept.24,1927)

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SINCLAIR LEWIS

Sinclair Lewis attacked the village of American Fiction with a vengeance. Where Anderson had at least felt sympathy for the failings of the village, Lewis had only a satiric contempt. Through his ridicule of village life he soon became leader of the rebels. Lewis spent the first eighteen years of his life in Sauk Center, Minnesota, a small prairie town, "where the old-fashioned, kindly, neighborly, democratic virtues are presumed to thrive in a congenial habitat."¹

Having received the "culture" Order of Books necessary in the form of a Degree from Yale, he became "jack of-all-trades;" janitor-colonialist; experimental Helicon Hall reporter, magazine editor, manuscript reader, stage and stage-way traveler to Europe, Mexico, Europe and elsewhere, a free lancer in California with William Hows Beest, and magazine story writer are a few of his professional experiences. His earlier novels - "in exemplification of the thesis that the genus Americanus is cousin german to the stuffing Mr. Menckan's lately discovered bookus Americanus"² are indicative of his hatred of small town dullness, which culminated in full force in Main Street.

Lewis's great literary power lies in his photographic accuracy in description. His ability to mimic brutally, his tireless energy in searching out the commonplace. He believes that "the whole world is being leveled by the march of

1. Farrington, Vernon Critical Realism in America p.364
 2. Farrington, V.L. Main Currents in American Thought
 Vol.III p.363

SINGLAI R LEWIS

Order of Honor

1. Main Street (1920)

2. Republic (1922)

SINCLAIR LEWIS

Sinclair Lewis attacked the village of American fiction with a vengeance. Where Anderson had at least felt sympathy for the failings of the village, Lewis had only a satiric contempt. Through his ridicule of village ways he soon became leader of the revolvers. Lewis spent the first eighteen years of his life in Sauk Center, Minnesota, a small prairie town, "where the old-fashioned, kindly, neighborly, democratic virtues are presumed to thrive in a congenial habitat."¹ Having received the "culture" he thought necessary in the form of a degree from Yale, he began a literary career as jack-of-all-trades; janitor-colonist at Upton Sinclair's experimental Helicon Hall, reporter, magazine editor, manuscript reader, steerage and stowaway traveler to Panama, Mexico, Europe and elsewhere, a free lancer in California with William Rose Benet, and magazine story writer "are a few of his professional experiences. His earlier novels - "in exemplification of the thesis that the genus Americanus is cousin german to the scoffing Mr. Mencken's lately discovered boobus Americanus"² are indicative of his hatred of small town dullness, which culminated in full force in Main Street.

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STANLEY LEWIS

Stanley Lewis attacked the village of American fiction with a vengeance. Where Anderson had at least felt sympathy for the failings of the village, Lewis had only a sadistic contempt. Through his ridicule of village ways he soon became leader of the revolvers. Lewis spent the first fifteen years of his life in Sank Center, Minnesota, a small prairie town, "where the old-fashioned, kindly, neighborly, democratic virtues were presumed to thrive in a congenial habitat." Having received the "culture" he thought necessary in the form of a degree from Yale, he began a literary career as Jack-of-all-trades; "janitor-colonialist at Eton Stanley's expert mental Helicon Hall, reporter, magazine editor, manuscript reader, stenographer and ^Waway traveler to Panama, Mexico, Europe and elsewhere, a free lancer in California with William Rose Bennett, and magazine story writer and a few of his professional expertness. His earlier novels - "in exemplification of the thesis that the new Americanism is again born main to the scottish Mr. Menckens's lately discovered hoped Americanism"² and indicative of his hatred of small town dullness, which culminated in full force in Main Street. Lewis's great literary power lies in his photographic accuracy in description, his ability to mimic bravely, his tireless energy in searching out the commonplace. He believes that "the whole world is being leveled by the march of

machines into one monotonous uniformity, before which all the individual colors and graces and prides and habits flee - or would flee if there were any asylum still uninvaded ----. The villages of the Middle west ---- have been conquered and converted by the legions of mediocrity, and now, grown rich and vain, are setting out to carry the dingy banner led by the booster's calliope, and the evangelist's bass drum, farther than it has ever gone before - to make provincialism imperialistic; so that all the native and instinctive virtues, freedom, powers, must rally in their own defense." ³

Lewis, along with other revolvers from the village virus, directed his scorn toward the uniformity which had invaded the small town and was then spreading outward toward the larger towns. The Great God Success, intellectual mediocrity, and excessive conventionality received their share of criticism. The reading public pounced upon Main Street as an open expression of what they believed they had unconsciously felt as a result of the inclusive "standardization."

The story of Main Street is mediocre enough: Carol Milford, one year out of college and, typically, yearning to do great things, marries good-hearted practical Dr. Will Kennicott of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Carol, in her intense dislike of the environment, attempts unsuccessfully, to improve the town. Her "fling of defiance" is spent in a year's war work in Washington. Finally, however, she returns

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J. Van Dorn, Carol. Contemporary American Novelists p. 128

to her husband, realizing that his love is stronger than her antipathy although she is still rebellious at the complacency of the small town.

In Main Street we see Mr. Lewis as " one of the millions of Americans who had come to think of their villages as dull in comparison with the more variegated worlds spread before them by newspapers, motion pictures, excursions in train or automobile. He was one of the thousands who had left their villages and with more distaste than homesickness remembered them in difficult but exciting cities. For all his gifts of expression, he was very near the run of the newer order of Americans in his specific resentments and his implied censures of the village. " 4

In the foreward to the novel, Lewis says,

" This is America - a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn, and dairies and little groves.

" The town is , in our tale, called ' Gopher Prairie, Minnesota.' But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Street everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana , in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up New York State or in the Carolina Hills. " 5

Lewis made his Gopher Prairie - which was a " continuation " of Gopher Prairie everywhere - dusty, smug, complacent and incapable of seeing possible changes for the better. His Carol Kennicott, says Van Doran, was not a genius. A genius

4. Van Doran, C. and Taylor, H. Sinclair Lewis pp 38,39

5. Main Street, foreword

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Carol Kennicott, says Van Doren, was not a genius. A genius

in like situation would have been drawn to the " bright foot-lights and fleshpots. " But Carol was superior to the village level only in her " virtue of discontent." At the last she yielded like any classic heroine struggling against her environment. She still maintained, though - and Mr. Lewis agreed with her - that her discontent had been virtue, not crime or folly. The villain of the piece had been the dull-⁶ness of Gopher Prairie.

The dullness is made evident in Will Kennicott's description of his home town to Carol :

" I never saw a town that had such up and coming people as Gopher Prairie. Bresnahan - you know - the famous auto manufacturer - he comes from Gopher Prairie. Born and brought up there ! And its a darn pretty town. Lots of fine maples and boxelders, and there's two of the dandiest lakes you ever saw, right near town ! And we've got even miles of cement walks already and building more everyday ---. Gopher Prairie is going to have a great future. Some of the best dairy and wheat land in the state right near there - some of it selling right now at one- fifty an acre , and I bet it will go up to two and a quarter in ten years. " ⁷

In spite of Kennicott's eager description Carol saw Gopher Prairie as " unprotected and unprotecting ; there was no dignity in it nor any hope of greatness. Only the tall red grain rose from the mass. It was a frontier- camp. It was not a place to live in, not possibly, not conceivably.

6. Van Dora, C. Sinclair Lewis p.23

7. Main Street p. 14

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" I never saw a town that had such up and coming people
as Gopher Prairie. Brewster - you know - the famous auto
manufacturer - he comes from Gopher Prairie. Born and brought
up there ! And like a damn pretty town. Lots of fine temples
and churches, and there's two of the bandstand takes you
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no dignity in it nor any hope of greatness. Only the tall
red grain rose from the mass. It was a frontier-land. It
was not a place to live in, not possibly, not conceivably.

The people - they'd be as drab as their houses , as flat as their fields." ⁸ She found out about the people shortly as she watched a scene in pantomime often to be repeated - " a man in cuffless shirt sleeves with pink arm garters, wearing a linen collar but no tie , yawned his way from Dyer's Drug Store across to the hotel. He leaned against the wall, scratched a while, sighed, and in a bored way gossiped with a man tilted back in his chair. " ⁹ Where now was Kennicott's boast of the up- and- coming Gopherites ?

Failing in reformatory measures for the town, rebellious Carol urges travel upon her harassed husband as a means of culture. She had long wanted a trip through the East. However, again her husband's prosaic mind refused to admit such a need although he glibly promised her they would do the East " up brown " after he attended the convention of the American Medical Association. He knew New York " clear through " having spent not quite a week there. But the trip was postponed perpetually and Carol had to give up her dreams of looking at Emerson's manse, or bathing in a " surf of jade and ivory " , or wearing a " trottoir and a summer fur." ¹⁰

The stuffiness of the small town, according to Lewis, is revealed in the case of Fern Mullins, dishonorably discharged from the teaching staff for having gone to a dance with a fellow given to drink. His pious mother insisted he'd never been drunk before - excepting a few times when she'd smelt

8. ibid. pp 26-27

9. ibid p. 34

10. ibid p. 300

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8. Ibid. pp 25-27
9. Ibid p. 28
10. Ibid p. 300

"likker " on his breath after he'd been out all night. Even then, of course, she explained he'd had a good excuse for the other boys had persuaded him. " Anyway, " she concluded, " never before had her boy fallen into the hands of a designing woman!" As a result of Fern's leading great, hulking Cy Bogart astray, she was asked to resign her position ; and although Sam Clark emphatically said , " We're-not- making - no - charges - whatever ! " the poor girl was refused even admittance into teacher's agencies on the strength of her escapade.¹¹

The future for Fern Mullins seemed to be marriage with a fellow who loved her , but was stupid he made her scream.

After her venture in Washington, Carol came to the realization that she was just one more stenographer there while in " G.P. " she was considered, however mistakenly, " a city girl." So she returned to the place where a good life was spent in " making a comfy home and bringing up some cute kids and knowing some nice homey people. " ¹²

Babbitt is another challenge to the pattern set for the American business man by fiction. In this novel again, as in Main Street , Lewis rebels against " middle aged romanticism, narrow convention, and blatant optimism. " ¹³ Although Zenith is rated as a small city, it still holds the provincial standards of a Gopher Prairie. Babbitt, himself, is the synthesis of the city in which he lives. He prided himself in being typical of ideal American manhood ; a " God fearing, hustling, successful two- fisted regular guy, who belongs to

11. ibid Chapt. 32 p 382 ff.

12. ibid p 9

13. Herron op cit p 385

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The future for Fern Sullivan seemed to be marriage with a fellow who loved her, but was tempted by her screams.

After her venture in Washington, Gerol came to the realization that she was just one more stenographer there, while in "D.C." she was considered, however mistakenly, "a city girl." So she returned to the place where a good life was found in "making a comfy home and bringing up some cute kids and knowing some nice homey people." 12

Madison is another challenge to the pattern set for the American business man by fiction. In this novel again, as in Main Street, Lewis rebels against "middle aged romanticism, narrow convention, and distant optimism." 13 Although Gerol

is rated as a small city, it still holds the provincial standards of a proper frontier. Madison, himself, is the syncretist of the city in which he lives. He united himself in being typical of local American manners: "and Gerol, hustling, successful two-faced regular guy, who belongs to

a church with pep and piety in it, who belongs to the Boos-
ters or the Rotarians or the Kiwanis, to the Elks or Moose or
Redmen or Knights of Columbus or any of a score of organiza-
tions of good jolly, kidding, laughing, sweating, upstanding,
lend- a -handing Royal Good Fellows, who plays hard and works
hard and whose answer to his critics is a squaretoed boot
that'll teach the grouches and smartalecks to respect the he-
man and get out and root for Uncle Samuel,U.S.A. ! " 14

This same attitude of independence so heartily expres-
sed in his famous address to the Chamber of Commerce is
further seen in his disparaging comment to his wife who
eagerly desired " culture ", that nothing prevented her
reading books and going to lectures and " all that junk".
But he himself disliked being dragged into cultural atmos-
phere for he balked quite fiercely at attending Mrs. Opal
Emerson Midge's lecture on " Cultivating the Sun Spirit "
at the League of the Higher Illumination."While Mrs. Babbitt
was inspired by Opal's speech (although she wasn't trained
in metaphysics and there was a lot " she couldn't quite
grasp "), George Babbitt wanted to know why in the dickens
those women wanted to put in their time " listening to that
blaa. " 15

In spite of his ridicule of conventions and the small
town way of thinking, Babbitt was glad enough, after his
revolt, to crawl back into his shell of peaceful dullness
and become again the Good Fellow among Good Fellows although

14. Babbitt p 188

15. Babbitt p 359

23.
a church with pay and glory in it, who belongs to the poor-
ters or the Rotarians or the Kiwanis, to the Elks or Moose or
Hedon or Knights of Columbus or any of a score of organiza-
tions of good jolly, kidding, laughing, sweating, aggrandizing,
leaving - handling Royal Good Fellows, who play hard and work

hard and whose answer to his critics is a squeaked foot
heel, if teach the preacher and amoralists to respect the re-
man and get out and root for Uncle Samuel, U.S.A. ! " 12
This same attitude of independence so heartily expres-

sed in his famous address to the Chamber of Commerce is
further seen in his disparaging comment to his wife who
eagerly desired " culture ", " she nothing prevented her
reading books and going to lectures and " all that junk."
But he himself disliked being dragged into cultural atmos-
phere for he disliked quite literally attending Mrs. Ogel
Harrison Webb's lecture on " Civilizing the San Joaquin "
at the lecture of the Higher Education, " While Mrs. Rabbit
was inspired by Ogel's speech (although she wasn't trained
in metaphysics and there was a lot " she couldn't do
grass "), George Rabbit wanted to know why in the dickens
those women wanted to put in their time " listening to that
dins. " 12

In spite of his attitude of convention and the small
town way of thinking Rabbit was glad enough, after his
novel, to crawl back into his shell of peaceful solitudes
and become again the good fellow among good fellows although

a last rebellious streak rejoiced at his son's revolt against conventional ways.

In the social satire of Main Street and in the satire of the empty pretentiousness of the American Business Man, Lewis has made an attack on the common creed and that attack has been overwhelmingly answered by the critics as Parrington points out.¹⁶ His personal life has been considered as the basis for his distorted view of American ideals. Critics insist he is suffering from an aggravated sense of astigmatism, and that in consequence he does not see eye to eye with normal vision. The world is out of focus to him - "askew in all the structural lines ---. He has deliberately cultivated a spleen that makes him dislike his neighbors because they are comfortable and contented."¹⁷ It is important to realize, above all, that Lewis is a satirist. He gives a diabolical twist to perfectly ordinary doings. For example, surely there is nothing wrong in the good time the Sacred Trinity class of girls had at their "weinerwurst party"? Groups of girls everywhere are doing things just like that and, as a consequence, being admired as versatile and good sports. Lewis, with the rancor of the satirist, makes the affair seem stupid and infantile. So it is throughout his books. His satire is often undeniably justified, and he has stirred up those who would ignore the growing forces of hypocrisy and over-sentimentality. But his work is exaggerated - over drawn - to receive the effect he desired.

16. For an analysis of Lewis' works in relation to his personal life see Parrington, op cit. pp. 365-366

17. Parrington op. cit. p.365

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16. For an analysis of Lewis' work in relation to his personal life see Partridge, op. cit. pp. 388-393
17. Partridge op. cit. p. 393

Critics have claimed his vituperativeness to be a result of his innate jealousy of comfort and content. How far this may be true is difficult to prove; however, his novels do give one the impression of " dwelling upon the horrors of the unsightly scaffolding and forgetting ~~the~~ growing Cathedral beneath. " 18

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

PART III

THE DEFENSE

ORDER OF Books

1. At the Court of Sayville(1890)
2. A Captain Rich Man (1905)
3. In Our Town (1908)
4. In the Heart of a Pool(1918)

THE
JOURNAL
OF
THE
ROYAL
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
INSTITUTE

PART III

THE
DIFFERENCE

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

William Allen White has long been recognized as a convincing defender of village life and its ideally democratic ways. In all phases of his life - as novelist, publicist, newspaper editor, and the inherent goodness of the small town. The setting of his work, which is admittedly local, is the Middle West, and although his work never reaches the height of universality, it has in it a forceful message of the values to be found in the small community.

Order of books

White is a product of the middle class of Kansas, a "believer in the essential goodness of man." As a widely recognized journalist, White has been the "leading spokesman for the independence of the small town newspaper." His long, close and personal acquaintance with the "country" has made him an informed and impressively influential defender of the West. "----" he has announced through editorial and fiction his faith in the basic excellence of the Middle West and its substantial rural and small town life. Among Kansas citizens and spokesmen White is outstanding as "a builder of a prairie civilization which has gradually assumed the common American shape." "Throughout all his work, White maintains a hearty bubbling energy, " the courage of his convictions, of all his sentiment, of all his laughter,

1. At the Court of Bayville(1899)
2. A Certain Rich Man (1906)
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WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

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White is a product of the puritan middleclass of Kansas, a "believer in the essential goodness of man."¹ As a widely recognized journalist, White has been the "fearless spokesman for the independence of the small town newspaper." His long, close and personal relationship with town and country "has made him an informed and increasingly influential defender of the West" ----. "he has announced through editorial and fiction his faith in the basic excellence of the Middle West and its substantial rural and small town life. Among Kansas citizens and spokesmen White is outstanding as "a builder of a prairie civilization which has gradually assumed the common American shape."² Throughout all his work, White maintains a hearty bubbling energy, "the courage of his convictions, of all his sentiment, of all his laughter,

1. Vernon L. Parrington Beginnings of Critical Realism in America. p. 374

2. Ima H. Herron Contemporary American Novelists p 134

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William Allen White has long been recognized as a convincing defender of village life and its ideally democratic ways. In all phases of his life - as novelist, publicist, newspaper editor, he has remained true to the inherent goodness of the small town. The setting of his work, which is admittedly local, is the Middle West, and although his work never reaches the height of universality, it has in it a forceful message of the values to be found in the small community.

White is a product of the Puritan ethicists of Kansas, a "believer in the essential good nature of man." As a widely recognized journalist, White has been the "voice" spokesman for the independence of the small town newspaper. His long, close and personal relationship with town and country "has made him an informed and increasingly influential defender of the West" ---. "he has announced through editorial and fiction his faith in the basic excellence of the Middle West and its substantial rural and small town life. Among Kansas citizens and spokesmen White is outstanding as "a builder of a private civilization which has gradually assumed the common American shape." Throughout all his work, White maintains a hearty bubbling energy, "the courage of his convictions, of all his sentiment, of all his laughter.

1. Vernon L. Parrington, Realism in American Literature, p. 134
2. The American Journalist, p. 134

of all his tears --- a multitude of right instincts and sound feelings. " In his stricter hours of work , of which he has many, he applies his " right instincts " and " sound feelings " to the problem of showing the causes of and means by which corruption works in politics and of tracing those effects of private greed which " ruin souls and torture societies."³

In his novels of the village, White assumes the same attitude with which he has regarded the small town all his life. He does not presume it to be perfection - rather he presents its faults as its virtues ; he drives overlong on neither aspect. And such an " all- round " point of view is actually most friendly to the village as a part of American national life, for when a picture of the whole is thrown in sharp relief what signify the failings as compared with the many deeds of kindly living ? That White is qualified in all respects as an authority on the topic is obvious. He has spent the main portion of his long and eventful life as a resident in the town of Emporia, Kansas. There he has entered the spirit of the town completely ; in politics, in social life, in religious matters. Webb Waldron cites an example of White's complete " oneness " with the town as he sings with the Christmas Eve carolers, becoming " part of his town , rejoicing with it."⁴ Yet his experiences have by no means been confined to the boundaries of a single village. His viewpoint is broadened through travel, through contact with diplomatic and cultural circles,

3. Carl Van Doran, Contemporary American Novelists p 134

4. Webb Waldron , "William Allen White " American Mercury

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3. Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, p. 154
4. Webb Watson, "William Allen White," American Mercury

through high positions of civic trust. Still he returns to the small town as his home.

White's first book "At the Court of Bayville" (1899) depicts against a village background the tendency of youth to follow in the footsteps of its parents. As the parent leads a worthy and meaningful life, so does the child. Parrington puts the theme caustically " --- the glories of pigtaills and overalls. The democracy of the vacant lot : rivalry in mabbles and handsprings - the leadership of the capable. " ⁵

What is considered White's best novel, A Certain Rich Man (1906) shows the friendliness and true democracy of the old-time America threatened by the greed of economic centralization. " The novel is a genuinely moving statement of a belief in the rightness of village life and ideals --. The characters are sharply observed and well presented." ⁶

In Our Town (1906) , a group of thirteen stories made up from happenings observed by White as editor of the Gazette, shows his town as a place " where you know everybody and they know you." He offers pictures of the town millionaire and the town drunk; the smart set and those who pretend to be smart ; the literary club and the would - be cultured group.

The atmosphere of the small village is set by a description of the paper's activities.

5. Parrington op. cit. p 374
6. Blankenship American Literature p. 652

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The atmosphere of the small village is set by a

description of the paper's activities.

" ----- It is only a country newspaper and knowing this we refuse to put on city airs. Of course we print the afternoon Associated Press report on the front page , under formal heads and with some pretense of dignity, but the first page is the parlour of the paper, as it is of most of its contemporaries , and in the other pages they and we go around in our shirt sleeves, calling people by their first names; teasing the boys and girls good naturedly ; tickling the pompous members of the village family with straws from time to time , and letting out the family secrets of the community without much regard for the feelings of the supercilious."⁷

White disclaims his town as backward and rural. The same popular airs are being whistled by young men walking home at midnight that " lovelorn young men are whistling in New York, Portland or San Francisco. The girls attend the colleges and universities of both the East and West. The people are just as well dressed as those in the cities. The annual arts and crafts exhibition offers " loot from the four corners of the earth " , the popular magazines are widely subscribed to, the word vase is even pronounced vahze, and in the homes of the town social leaders , " dinner " , rather than " supper", is eaten at night.

The author makes plain the fact that class consciousness rarely present a problem. Although the town has its accepted leaders, especially among the women, and much bickering goes

" ---- It is only a country newspaper and knowing this we refuse to put on city airs. Of course we print the afternoon associated press report on the front page, under formal heads and with some pretenses of dignity, but the first page is the portion of the paper, as it is of most of its contemporaries, and in the other pages that we go around in can admit ourselves, calling people by their first names; treating the boys and girls good naturedly; picking the posthumous members of the village family with arrows from the bow-tie, and jettisoning the family secrets of the community without much regard for the feelings of the spectators."

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The author makes plain the fact that class consciousness rarely presents a problem. Although the town has its accepted leaders, especially among the women, and much interesting goes

on as to who shall receive especial favor from those mighty personages, there is no distinction because of a person's finances . " A boy with twelve dollars a week, who will spend a dollar or two a month to have his clothes pressed, can accomplish any social heights which rise before him, and there is no barrier in our town to a girl merely because she presides at the ribbon counter, which, of course, is as it should be." ⁸

The town's people are essentially kind hearted and sincere in their sympathy for others. For although some women in town brought two prizes for their whist parties - one to give if their friend should win the prize , and another to give if the woman they hated should win,⁹ even though one woman stooped to make such a distinction, it was a year before poor Mrs. Markley, wife of the wealthy - and miserly -John Markley, discovered her husband was unfaithful to her. Even then she did not discover it through a prattling gossip but through a means of circumstance. The townpeople's kindness and charity have been proved time and time over. " They are always willing to forgive , and be it man or woman who takes a misstep in our town - which is the counterpart of hundreds of American towns - if the offender shows that he wishes to walk straight , a thousand hands are stretched out to help and guide him. It is not true that a man or woman who makes a mistake is eternally damned by his fellows. If one persists in wrong after the first misdeed it is not because

8. Ibid p 43

9. Ibid p 35

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a mistake is eternally damned by his fellows. It one per-
sists in wrong after the first misdeed it is not because

sheltering love and kindness were not thrown around the wrong-doer. ---- We are all neighbors and friends , and when sorrow comes, no one is alone. The towns greatest tragedies have proven the town's sympathy and have been worth their cost. " ¹⁰ What higher tribute than this could White have paid his town !

" The invasion of the small town by industrialism and the disintegration of village virtues " is Vernon L. Parrington's interpretation of In the Heart of a Fool (1918) . He calls White " an idealist who opposes the end of Main Street and his destruction by the herd " who concludes with " the excellence of love and the foolishness of selfishness." ¹¹ The book is an expression of White's abounding faith in justice and the essential goodness of man. His pride and affection for Harvey are obvious as he traces its growth from the sunshine and grass of the prairie to a " thousand flued Hill." The book explains the America that rose when her great day came -, exultant , triumphant to the glorious call to an ideal, arose from sordid things environing her body and soul, and consecrated herself without stint or faltering hand to the challenge of democracy." ¹²

In the Heart of a Fool traces the heart breaking growth of the town of Harvey from a friendly democratic kindly community to a large town of greed and avarice. Harvey , at first , was typical of many New England towns although its setting was in the West. Its pioneers were of " good solid

10. Ibid p 19

11. Parrington op cit. p 374

12. White In the Heart of a Fool p.5

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In the Heart of a Fool traces the heart-breaking growth of the town of Harvey from a friendly, democratic village

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10. Id. p. 12
11. Id. p. 12
12. White in the Heart of a Fool p. 5

stock" from the east and had the typical New Englander's desire for the convential institutions of civilized life; the schoolhouse, the newspaper, orderly government, and churches.¹³ This soon was a " busy and noisy and restless world," however for first the cattle trade caused trade to flourish and then the discovery of coal and oil and gas brought in a new tide of material avarice, washing out the old ways of human kindness. Money became the great god Budd and everyone thought the " quick easy and exorbitant profits really made the equality of opportunity that everyone desired. They thought in terms of democracy which is at bottom a spiritual estate, - and they acted like gross materialists." ¹⁴ The " prairie grass disappeared," and the blue sky over Harvey was threatened and people were saying with Tom Van Dorn, " The world is mine--- in this life I shall take what I find that I can get. I'm not going to be meek, nor humble, nor patient, nor forgiving and forbearing ---.

" I intend to command, not obey ! Rule, not serve ! I shall take and not give - not give save as it pleases me to have my hand licked now and then." ¹⁵

Meanwhile the profiteers were raking in money from their mines ; money which should have been given the underpaid workers, that their children might be clean and not hungry. Those people were considered worthless, and not intelligent enough to desire the comforts of life, meaning , naturally, proper food, shelter and clothing. Rather, the money was used

13. ibid p. 63

14. ibid p. 69

15. ibid p. 19

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to refurnish, and then re-re-furnish the enormous - and hideous - mansions on the hill. The " Haves " were in power and the " Have -Nots " were not worth consideration.

Although lewdness and obscenity were prevalent in the valley of workmen, (for they knew no better) the state of marriage was held in respect on the hill: the " development of a two phase soul with but one will. Politics in Harvey was a matter of helping one's friends. Everywhere was self interest. Only a few exceptions could be found ; as the young girl in love with the town's chief pride and joy, (and sex - addict, to boot !) who asked, " Isn't love the miracle that brings the soul out into the world through the senses ? " ; and as the young fanatic, Grant Adams, who pledged himself to service for mistreated mine workers of Harvey even to the repudiation of his own son ; and as the minister who thanking God at New Year's that the " mission church at South Harvey is on a paying basis , and the pipe organ in the home church paid for - that's some comfort ! " It was such people as these, kindly, believing people who felt the " work of the men who toil with their hands is just as valuable to society as preaching and trading and buying and selling and banking and editing and lawing and doctoring, and insuring and school - teaching, " ¹⁶ that were depended upon to rebuild the town of Harvey away from its " crass riot of greed and toward a place abounding in equality of opportunity, a place where money would rank second after brotherliness , where Laura Nesbit's

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words would ring true " --- it isn't the good the money does those who receive, its the good it does the giver. And the good it does the giver is measured by the amount of sacrifice - the degree of himself that he puts into it. " ¹⁷

Such is William Allen White's belief in the eternal " goodness" of the small town, the only lasting champion of democracy and equality. So firm is his belief in human kind that even now he sees man as essentially democratic. After re-reading an editorial he wrote nearly forty years previously he says he is convinced that man is essentially static. He is what he was and what he will be. Barring sickness which changes his physical set- up , he is the same man in his declining years that he was in his youth. He learns more, he defines the things more accurately, is a little keener in his perceptions. But his attack on life, the things called his aims and purposes, remains, through the changing years , unchanged ----. I used to think the best people of a community were what I have defined them here , ' good, honest, upright, law-abiding people.' I know now that there is no group of best people--- the persons I would define as best people change. It is never the same group, certainly not the temple pharisees and their acolytes, and never the ragtail and bobtail. But out of the scribes and pharisees and out of the scum and in between these two, different crystallizations of public opinion come at different times and so democracy was saved when we abolished caste lines. And the only threat

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to democracy that I see now, after forty years, is a hereditary economic class which shall assume the powers of a ruling caste." 18

Order of Books

1. Sepulchre from Indiana (1897)
2. The Turnell (1915)
3. Magnificent Ambersons (1918)
4. Alice Adams (1921)
5. The Highlander (1924)

to democracy that I see now, after forty years, is a benefit-
 ary economic class which shall assume the power of a
 ruling caste." 18

A "James Whitcomb Riley with a college education, writing fiction instead of verse," Booth Tarkington is another staunch defender of village friendliness. Born and educated (except for his few years at Princeton) in Indiana, he has observed and participated in the life of mid-western towns. He had been exposed to college life in his college years - as he himself puts it, "I have no doubt that I imbibed some education there (Princeton). Though it seems to me that I tried to avoid that as much as possible."¹ His life had been rather independent with time for foreign travel and summers in Maine as well as his numerous literary works.

Order of Books

The themes found in Tarkington's novels have been usually the problems and ambitions of young people and the social and economic life of small towns in the mid-west. According to Van Doren, Tarkington is the "king of adolescence and mold of Indiana."² He has been veritably called by some critics an automation grinding out novels with happy endings to please American housewives. But he refuses to believe that art requires gloom. Those whose books invariably end in tragedy are mere "entertainment writers" and worthy of being classified only among the "lowest forms of writers."³

Despite various criticisms of his plots, Booth Tarkington has done much toward lifting the despairingly gloomy veil from the fiction of the Middle West. His gentility and cheer-

1. Dickinson, Lee Don. Booth Tarkington, p. 2.
 2. Van Doren, Carl. Contemporary American Novelists, p. 64.
 3. Roberts, Kenneth. "The Middle West Since the Indiana." Nat. Evening Post v. 804, pp. 14-15.

BOOTH TARKINGTON

Order of Books

1. Gentlemen from Indiana (1899)
2. The Turnout (1912)
3. Wayworn Andersons (1918)
4. Alice Adams (1921)
5. The Widenader (1924)

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1. Dickinson, Asa Don Booth Tarkington, p.2

2. Van Doran, Carl Contemporary American Novelists, p.84

3. Roberts, Kenneth "The Gentleman from Maine and Indiana "
Sat. Evening Post v. 204:ppl4-15.

A "James Whitcomb Riley with a college education, writing fiction instead of verse," Booth Tarkington is another staunch defender of village friendliness. Born and educated (except for his few years at Princeton) in Indiana, he has observed and participated in the life of mid-western towns. He had been exposed to a classical education during his college years -- a he himself puts it, "I have no doubt that I finished some education there (Princeton). Though it seems to me that I tried to avoid that as much as possible."¹ His life had been rather independent with time for foreign travel and summers in Maine as well as his numerous literary works. The themes found in Tarkington's novels have been usually the problems and ambitions of young people and the social and economic life of small towns in the mid-west. According to Van Doren, Tarkington is the "class of adolescence and old of Indiana."² He has been veritably called by some critics an automaton spinning out novels with happy endings to please American housewives. But he refuses to believe that and requires gloom. Those whose books invariably end in tragedy and have "entertainment writers" and worthy of being classified only among the "lowest forms of writers."³

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1. Dickinson, Asa Don Booth Tarkington, p. 2.
 2. Van Doren, Carl Contemporary American Novelists, p. 84.
 3. Roberts, Kenneth The Gentlemen from Maine and Indiana
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view of life are evident throughout his novels. His village backgrounds are true to real life ; his characters are alive and compelling. Easily one of the leading American novelists of his generation, Tarkington has reached a vast reading public in his championship of the village as a place - not of bigotry, but of understanding kindness.

The Gentleman from Indiana (1899) is a revelation of small town goodness. It tells of the rise to power of the college-bred journalist John Harkless, defender of independence and purifier of political campaigns. His love for all the village of Platville means leads him courageously through many a risky adventure so endearing him to his fellow-townsmen that they take turns "looking after him ," and protecting him from the ruthless Cross Roads gang. Harkless himself was typical of the villagers in his willingness to help others in time of need - as he had helped Old Mr. Fisher " find himself" again; in his eagerness to protect the people from rotten politics in the form of Mr. McCune.

The ending of the novel is typical of the spirit pervading throughout. Watching the villagers rejoicing over Harkless' nomination to Congress, Helen Sheridan says,

" Look. Aren't the good, dear people ?"

" 'The beautiful people,' I answered." ⁴

So we find in Booth Tarkington a contributor to the general contentment at the interpretation of the American vil-

view of life are evident throughout his novels. His village backgrounds are true to real life; his characters are alive and compelling. Easily one of the leading American novelists of his generation, Tarkington has reached a vast reading public in his ownership of the village as a place - not of dignity, but of understanding kindness.

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So we find in Booth Tarkington a commentator to the general sentiment of the interpretation of the American vil-

lage as happy and innocent community!⁵ He decries the ruthless ways of finance as too hurried to "stop and shake hands with a friend on the street", too busy to notice the homely things of life and too eager for "smoke" to realize that Wealth and Bigness after all are present only as one minor phase of complete living.

Bibbs Sheridan, central figure of The Turmoil (1915) is characteristic of the dreamy quality to be found in the village at the turn of the century. Even though his dreaminess led others - even his family - to think him "not quite right", he alone had a true sense of values. His father worshipped "Bigness" and would sacrifice all to it, even himself. He earnestly believed "that there is no end but Bigness ever and for ever."⁶

But Bibbs, after being forced to give up his peaceful and contemplative mode of living for the role of "a hustler", still asked of Bigness its purpose. Each generation in turn toiled and sweated and slaved that their posterity might live in peace and wisdom enjoying the fruits of the earth."⁷ And in the end, posterity enjoyed no such pleasures but only further turmoil. To Bibbs the whole thing seemed a useless sacrifice. In trying to make his father understand his thoughts, he said of Wealth (the precursor of Bigness),

"What is the use of this city being rich and powerful? They don't teach the children any more in the school because

5. Boynton, Percy H. Literature and American Life, p.504

6. The Turmoil, p.5

7. Ibid, p.345

large as happy and innocent community? He describes the ruthless ways of finance as too horrible to "stop and share hands with a friend on the street", too busy to notice the homely things of life and too eager for "smoke" to realize that wealth and business after all are present only as one minor phase of complete living.

Barba Sheriden, central figure of The Turnout (1915) is characteristic of the present quality to be found in the life of the turn of the century. Even though his dreaminess led others - even his family - to think him "not quite right", he alone had a true sense of values. His father worshipped "Business" and would ascribe all good, even himself. He earnestly believed "that there is no end but business ever and for ever." ²

But Barba, after being forced to give up his parental and conservative mode of living for the role of "a rebel", still asked of business its purpose. Each generation in turn rolled and asserted and asked that their posterity might live in peace and wisdom enjoying the fruits of the earth. ³ And in the end, posterity enjoyed no such pleasures but only further turmoil. To Barba the whole thing seemed a needless sacrifice. In trying to make his father understand his thoughts, he said of wealth (the precursor of business): "What is the use of this life being rich and powerful? They don't teach the children any more in the school because

2. Boynton, Percy W. Interventions and American Life, p. 204.
3. The Turnout, p. 2.
V. 1915, p. 248.

some people - not rich and powerful people - have thought the thoughts to teach the children. And yet when you've been reading the paper I've heard you objecting to the children being taught anything except what helps them make money. You said it was wasting the taxes. You want them taught to make a living, but not to live. When I was a little boy this wasn't an ugly town ; now its hideous. What's the use of being big just to be hideous ? I mean I don't think all this has meant really going ahead- its just been getting bigger and dirtier and noisier. Wasn't the whole country happier and in many ways wiser when it was smaller and cleaner and quieter and kinder ? " 8

The Magnificent Ambersons (1918) again shows the development and growth of a small town. The opening description of the book sets the time of the story as " the days of front halls, side halls, back halls, of parlours, of sitting rooms and libraries and trolleys drawn by mules. " These last were " genially accomodating for a lady could whistle to one from an upstairs window and the car would halt at once and wait for her while she shut the window, put on her hat and cloak, went downstairs, found an umbrella, told ' the girl ' what to have for dinner and came forth from the house." 9

The friendly and understanding spirit of the village life at the turn of the century may be seen in Isabel Minafer's comment on the curiosity of " funny, fat, old Mts. Johnson"

8. The Turmoil , p.360

9. The Magnificent Ambersons , p.6

some people - not rich and powerful people - have thought the thoughts to reach the children. And yet when you've been reading the paper I've heard you objecting to the children being taught anything except what helps them make money. You said it was wasting the taxes. You want them taught to make a living, but not to live. When I was a little boy this wasn't an ugly town; now it's hideous. What's the use of being big just to be hideous? I mean I don't think all this has meant really going ahead - it's just been getting bigger and bigger and noisier. Wasn't the whole country happier and in many ways wiser when it was smaller and cleaner and quieter and kinder? 5

The Mammilliant Andersons (1914) again shows the development and growth of a small town. The opening description of the book sets the time of the story as "the days of front halls, side halls, back halls, of parlours, of sitting rooms and libraries and trophy's drawn by miles." These last were "generally accommodating for a lady could whistle to one from an upstairs window and the car would halt at once and wait for her while she shut the window, put on her hat and cloak, went downstairs, found an umbrella, told the girl what to have for dinner and came forth from the house." 6

The friendly and understanding spirit of the village life at the turn of the century may be seen in Isabel Minister's comment on the carousality of "fanny, fat, old Mrs. Johnson"

who sat at her window with opera glasses focused on the street and sometimes forgot to put the light out in the room behind her ! Yet Isabel philosophically says, " She's a good friendly old thing , a little too intimate in her manner, sometimes, and if her poor old opera glasses afford her the quiet happiness of knowing what sort of a young man our new cook is walking out with I'm the last to begrudge it to her. " ¹⁰

The Ambersons and their mansion made up - in a purely democratic way - the magnificent element in contrast with the homely ways of the less wealthy. They were leaders in society, in the cultural advancement of the village, in business. But the new " hustling " ways surpassed the Ambersons. Their magnificence was overshadowed by the shadow of the " New Americans," optimistic believers in hustling and honesty because both paid ; who were idealists striving that their city might become a " better , better , and better city," meaning by "better" "more prosperous " . Their slogan became " The more prosperous my beloved city, the more prosperous beloved I ! So Tarkington mourned the passing of the old era - the time of friendly democracy , of love for homespun things - in favor of smoke-screened, hustling, factory filled cities.

Alice Adams (1921) offers the pathetic story of the "heroine's " desperate intricacies to capture a husband. The small town is used as the stage for Alice's struggles to raise herself in the social life of the elite, despite her "democra-

tic " background. When she finally accepts the fact that " select balls " and " little dinners " are not for her, she turns to her newly planned middle-class life; happy in the thought that, although the transition would be difficult and filled with frequent gloom, the result would be " gay with sunshine." ¹¹

The Midlander (1924) is the Middle-West story of Dan Oliphant, a character typical of the city he has helped to develop. The changes taking place in Midland during the turn of the century are similar to those occurring in other towns all over the United States at that time. Dan Oliphant is a " Babbitt " , a city-booster who visualizes his Oranby Addition as the hope of future generations - even to the exclusion of family interests and friends. The atmosphere of the town is realistically and convincingly portrayed and shows the influence early in young Dan's career. He " disported himself about the neighborhood - or about other neighborhoods, for that matter - in whatever society offered him any prospect of gayety. He played marbles ' for keeps ' with ragtag and bobtail on every vacant lot in town , he never washed his hands or face, or brushed his hair except upon repeated command , yet loved water well enough to ' run off swimming' and dive through a film of ice upon an early Saturday in March." Among his many accomplishments were " swearing with intricacy " , smoking almost anything not fireproof , inhaling,

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and dive through a film of ice upon an early February in
March." Among his many accomplishments were "a series with
intensity", "smoking almost anything but tobacco", "kissling

and gambling with instruments " implements more sophisticated than marbles ," and above all, keeping these accomplishments from the knowledge of his parents. " ¹²

But even with such a varied childhood Dan still found time to defend his friends and protect them from cruel insults. When Harlan would have " put Sam Kohn off the place " because he was a Jew and therefore - to Harlan's mind - an undesirable, Dan stood up for his chum and would have fought his brother rather than have Sam's feelings hurt. Yet he did so not with a superior feeling that Sam needed protection since he was Jewish , but because Harlan had no right to insult his friend whether a Jew or not. " ¹³

Dan's childhood in Midland had a lasting effect upon his life for he came to connect the town with thoughts of home. Upon his return from a visit to New York he confided to Martha Shelby , " The minute I got off the train I had the feeling that this is where I honestly belong. It was home and the people and the streets and the yard, even the air - they all feel homelike to me. " ¹⁴

Mid land also seemed to Dan a place where he could " let his breath out " and talk in natural tones without getting scared of the consequences . And the people themselves took a live interest in one another. Even when meeting on the street they'd stop and shake hands and ask about each others' families , and they're mighty nice intelligent lookin' people,

12. The Midlander , p.4

13. ibid ,chapter 2.

14. ibid , p.52

and gambling with instruments "instruments more sophisticated than knives," and above all, keeping these accomplishments from the knowledge of his parents. " 12

But even with such a varied childhood Dan still found time to defend his friends and protect them from cruel injuries. When Burton would have "put Sam Kohn off the place" because he was a Jew and therefore - to Herman's mind - an undesirable, Dan stood up for his chum and would have fought his brother rather than have Sam's feelings hurt. Yet he did so not with suspicion feeling that Sam needed protection since he was Jewish, but because Herman had no right to insult his friend whether a Jew or not. " 13

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too. In New York, everybody hurries by ; they don't know each other anyway , of course, " ¹⁵ explained Dan.

Throughout the novel, Tarkington portrays the mid-western town as a place of " dignified spaciousness " as compared with New York City " with the squeezed brownstone fronts and apartments " ¹⁶ where living is hurried and purposeless.

DOROTHY SANFELD FISHER

Order of Books

1. Millstone People (1915)
2. Rough Hewn (1920)
3. Winning Cup (1922)
4. Deepening Stream (1930)

15. The Midlander , p.51

16. The Midlander , p.2

The defense of the village is not the chief aim of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, but her writings have had much to do with counteracting the vicious tirades of the abolitionists. Mrs. Fisher has the happy faculty of recognizing the bad along with the good, and assigning to each its proper place. The scarcity of cultured beauty, the superstitions, the commonness so often hovering on the vulgar, are described and condemned by the instruments of village life. Accepting these characteristics, Mrs. Fisher adds the friendliness, the community fellowship, the sense of values of right and wrong, thus offering a composite picture of village relationships as it is lived - not only in

Order of Books

1. Hillsboro People (1915)
 2. Rough Hewn (1920)
 3. Brimming Cup (1922)
 4. Deepening Stream (1930)
- Miss Canfield, now Mrs. Fisher, was born in Hillsboro, Kansas, daughter of a university professor. She has lived in Europe and America, has made many acquaintances and encouraging friendships with people of many nations. She received her bachelor's degree from Ohio State University and her doctorate degree from Columbia. After her marriage she came to live on the side of a mountain near a little village in Vermont (Arlington). Here she learned thoroughly and participated in the spirit of New England lives. Mrs. Fisher's deep-rooted understanding of small town life has enabled her to present it realistically, to defend the old fundamentals of home life and training,

The defense of the village is not the chief aim of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, but her writings have done much toward counteracting the vicious tirades of the attackers. Mrs. Fisher has the happy faculty of recognizing the bad along with the good, and assigning to each its proper place. The scarcity of cultured beauty, the prejudices, the commonness so often bordering on the vulgar, are decried and condemned by the insurgents of village life. Accepting these characteristics, Mrs. Fisher adds the friendliness, the community fellowship, the sense of values of right and wrong, thus offering a composite picture of village relationships as it is lived - not only in her town in Vermont - but in its counterpart all over the United States.

Miss Canfield, now Mrs. Fisher, was born in Lawrence, Kansas, daughter of a university professor. She was educated in Europe and America ; her wide travel broadening her sympathies and encouraging friendships with people of many nations. She received her bachelor's degree from Ohio State University and her doctorate degree from Columbia. After her marriage she came to live on the side of a mountain near a little village in Vermont " (Arlington). Here she learned thoroughly and participated in the spirit of New England lives. Mrs. Fisher's deep-rooted understanding of small town life has enabled her to present it realistically , to defend " the old fundamentals of home life and training,

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the wholesome and the uplifting. " Pattee says, " She has been a wholesome influence upon her period, a period sadly needing such guidance as hers. " 1

As Mrs. Fisher has affected her readers, so she has affected those living in her sphere. Dorothea Lawrence Man relates this conversation :

" ' Variety is what life needs to be well rounded,' Dorothy Canfield once told me.' You should know country life as well as city life. You should mingle intimately with people of other countries than your own - living among them, not merely traveling through their cities. As an American, it would be well to have at least one part of your education in an entirely different section of the country from that in which you live.' " 2

Just such a liberal minded philosophy of education pervades Mrs. Fisher's novels. Her central theses : education, family relationships and social customs, are developed in the atmosphere of quiet villages where contentment - not stagnant - but progressive - may be found. She says in an article :

" Those in cities, living with feverish haste in the present only, cannot understand the comforting sense we have of belonging also to the past and future. Our own youth is not dead to us, as yours is, from lack of anything to recall it. The people we love do not slip quietly into that bitter oblivion to which the dead are consigned by those too hurried

1. F.L. Pattee , The New American Literature 1890-1930,p.266
2. Dorothea L. Man, " Dorothy Canfield, the Little Vermonter"

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I. P. L. Pastore : The New American Literature 1890-1930, p. 188
S. Dorothy L. Mar. "Dorothy Campbell, the Little Vermeer"

to remember. All their quaint and dear absurdities which make up personality are embalmed in the leisurely talk of the village, still enriched by all they brought to it." ³

Thus we see Mrs. Fisher setting forth the "belief that community fellowship - a gathering to watch a century plant bloom - breeds an artistic spirit finer than the old world art and culture can offer." ⁴

The meaning of this is clearly seen in The Hillsboro People (1915) a series of pictures of life in a small, quiet Vermont village where contentment with life is lord and master. The summer folk wonder at the uneventful lives of the natives. " For mercy's sake, what do you people do , all the time, away off here, so far from everything. " Then Simple Martin, the town fool, responds philosophically, " Do ? Why, we jes' live ! " Mrs. Fisher continues ; " And sometimes it seems to us that we are the only people in America engaged in that most wonderful occupation. We know, of course, that we must be wrong in thinking thus, and that there must be countless other Hillsboros scattered everywhere, rejoicing as we do in an existance which does not enecessarily make us care-free or happy, which does not in the least absolve us from working hard (for Hillsboro is unbelievably poor in money), but which does keep us alive in every fiber of our sympathy and thrilling with the consciousness of the life of others. " ⁵

3. Reader's Digest v. 36 pp.22-8.

4. Parrington, V.L. Main Currents in American Thought, III, p. 376

5. Hillsboro People " At the Foot of Hemlock Mt. " p.5

The fullness of life to be had in the small town is appreciated through the agonizing efforts of Old Miss Abigail to draw the populace back to their native Greenford from the blooming mill-city of Johnsonville. She continued Church services even though only two faithful souls made up the congregation ; she kept the library open even though no one read the books ; she insisted on keeping school for six reluctant children. And in the end her loyalty won out. She willingly sacrificed her last bit of mountain " land " with its rushing streams and latent electrical power that the development of a mill might induce the lagging villagers back to their waiting homes ; that the roads need no longer be grown to grass for want of " men and women and little children to come over to and from their homes. " ⁶, that Christmas parties may be attended joyously (not for bribes of hot meals) and result in happiness (not children crying from " mortal lonesomeness").

In Rough Hewn (1920) ,Mrs. Fisher pictures the inevitable attraction of the small town for those who have known its "folskey"ways; its "longline of splendid splendid elms";its "long New England farm-houses" where you could see the head of the lady of the house from one window and see the head of a cow from another "which arrangement of living is just as clean as any other for" you have so much woodshed and hay-horn and things between you." ⁷ Although Neal and Marise, in

6. Hillsboro People " Adeste Fideles " p.336

7. Rough Hewn, p.406

their love for art and travel, met in Paris, they plan to live in their remembered Asheley, Vermont for contentment and abundant living.

The Brimming Cup (1920) , continuing the story of Marise and Neale from their wedding day on, offers the story of the right type of atmosphere for the bringing-up of children, and shows the great advantage to be had in the small town in the right fashioning of children's lives. Van Doran says "Rarely have a mother's relations with her children been so sweetly represented; rarely have the manners of a New England township been more glowingly portrayed. The setting glows among its green hills and valleys, its snows and flowers. There are minor characters that stand up vividly in the memory, like persons known face to face. The atmosphere is at once tense with desire and gracious with understanding. Though the materials come from an old tradition they have been treated with the fires of a scrutinizing mind which burn beneath the novelists." ⁸ The power of village upbringing and influence is seen in Marise herself as she masters the temptation to refute the reality of her contentment and seek joy in a thrilling passion. The settled companionship of her husband and the heavy burden of children, she realizes, are of more worth than any of the rapture and luxury she would gain in exchange.

In The Deepening Stream (1930) the town of Rustdorf is exemplified as the center of sympathetic kindness and friendship, influencing the lives of its inhabitant. The story of

Matey Gilbert begins when she is four years old and takes her through the early years of her married life. Her father, a professor of French, has built for his family an apparently "cultured " home, but seen through Matey's honest eyes it is only superficially so. Beneath the polished appearance of her parents are overwhelming arrogance and stillborn individuality. This same honesty enables Matey to recognize in Rustdorf the true meaning of right learning , and the secret of beauty and permanence in her marriage.

A village such as Rustdorf has a " powerful pull " even for a visitor. As Matey says ; " I don't feel like a newcomer. Less than ever in my life. It sounds foolish, literary,made up- but almost from the first,I've felt as though I'd come back to a --- place I'd always known, to people near to me."⁹

What was the great attraction that drew people? Certainly it was not the social activities ; " a visit to Poughkeepsie for a concert, or a free lecture at Vassar, " or the "Rustdorf Chorus " which gave a public performance every spring, or the activities of the "Bridge Club ", or the "Village Improvement Society." ¹⁰ Certainly none of these " doings " would make the village of Rustdorf so important to its visitors. Now would the village appeal to those who aspired to upper brackets in society for " Everybody was related to everybody else by blood, or marriage, or old neighborhood habits; everybody knew the resources,financial and intellectual, of all the rest.

9. The Deepening Stream, p.110

10. ibid , p.157

It would have been impossible for anyone to pretend to be other than he was so nobody bothered to try." ¹¹

Neither would the appeal of Rustdorf be due to the exciting and dramatic lives of those living there for all had the same prosaic attitude as Adrien - " Better be a good savings-bank cashier than a medium artist." ¹²

The attraction was none of these things. Matey herself experienced it after she and her family had completed their war work in France and were about to return home. " Her longing for home wasn't personal. Her nostalgia was like that of a lost or bewildered dog or horse, sick for a familiar smell or sound - like that of a refugee for the one spot where her pulse would beat in unison with that of the earth and sky. It was for the feel under her hand of the familiar door catches, for the irregularity under her feet of the well known warped floor boards, for the faint smell of creosote in the attic which she had always tried to prevent, for the broad gleam of the Hudson from the windows of the children's room, for the myriad-leaved vitality of the beach-tree; for the blades of grass growing within her own yard different from any other grass." ¹³

Thus the appeal of Rustdorf, although indescribable in so many words, makes itself known through the minute and homely details of everyday living. The importance of " abundant life" pervades all of Mrs. Fisher's novels. Optimistically advancing the " old fundamentals of home life and training,

11. ibid, p.158

12. ibid, p.119

13. ibid, p.338

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11. Idyl, p. 138
12. Idyl, p. 116
13. Idyl, p. 138

the wholesome and the uplifting, " ¹⁴ the keynote of each novel has been the genuine qualities to be found in small towns and villages. Her villages are not grotesquely distorted - as some critics say- as the ideal, for she offers a complete picture, neither completely bad , nor completely good. Seen in such a light , the " touch of things earthly" endears itself to ordinary humans so susceptible to failings - and offers a place of refuge, of growth and real living.

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H.E. Stoll once said, " Literature is, of course, not life, neither history nor material for history, but a scroll where are traced and characterized the unfettered thoughts of writers and reader, a life within life, fancy somewhat at odds with life. " ¹

PART IV

Professor Stoll's statement that literature does not represent real life may be understood after the foregoing discussion.

A GLANCE INTO THE FUTURE

The author sees it. The reader in turn interprets the work of the author. How far from real life must be the result! Sinclair Lewis described a village as detestable and ugly as Ogish Prairie, Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio is a place demanding psycho-pathic attention. On the other extreme Booth Tarkington and William Allen White insist that all villagers are good, dear folk worthy of God's blessings. Mrs. Dorothy Canfield Fisher would seem most representative of the village in its actuality. In her obvious inclination to avoid either defense or attack of the village she has become its most promising support. She admits its failings - its tendency toward gossip, its veering away from industrialization which so many consider progressive; she admits the lack of cultural and social opportunities to be found in large cities. Admitting all this, she has still shown that happiness may be found in small town life, that fullness in living does not necessarily depend on " civilized " conveniences. Mrs. Fisher has experienced the " happiness which

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Of course, the town or village is not for everyone. This would be a sad world if we all had the same tastes. Many have, however, learned to love the small town for its friendly ways, its helpfulness, its neighborliness, and above all its dependability - the knowledge that there , friends once made will remain so through trying difficulties.

What will be the reputation of the village in the future ? That is difficult to say, but modern novels are largely tending away from the too sweet romanticism of White and Tarkington ; from the cruel and " debunking " realism of Anderson and Lewis. Novels today have assumed a gracious reality - one of sympathy and understanding. The " tough minded " period is fast disappearing. The new realism of today in its very nature will retain the friendly democracy of the village, neither the beautiful village of Emporia, Kansas nor the hideous village of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota but one just halfway between as are all good things in this life.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis has been an objective analysis of the controversial writings on the American village. For such an analysis, books by representatives of both the attack and the defense have been discussed as an indication of the future reputation of the village may be had; whether it be "friendly democracy" or "virus".

PART V

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The small town has been a theme in American literature since the times of Captain John Smith in his True Relations (1608) and Governor Winthrop and Governor Bradford in their journals. Phillip Freneau continued the description of American town life in the American Village (1775). The Hartford Wits were concerned with both the village virtues (Greenfield Hill) and village stupidity (M'Finell). James Paulding Cooper and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow before the Civil War, Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Eilkins Freeman after it, aided in bringing the village to the foreground as a place of "pleasant virtues". Edgar Watson Howe, however, revealed the grim life of a 19th century mid-western village in The Story of a Country Town (1883). Mark Twain continued the onslaught against the village with The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg (1888) and the publication of Edgar Lee Masters' Spanish River Anthology (1915) culminated in the vituperative work of Anderson, and scornful satires by Lewis. The village

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was not without its defenders for William Allen White, Booth Tarkington and Dorothy Canfield Fisher had been writing in praise of village ways long before the attack reached its peak of Anderson and Lewis. In the thesis the authors of the controversy have been divided into the attackers and the defenders regardless of their literary chronology that a more objective view may be had.

Sherwood Anderson has treated the village of the middle west as a place of despair and futility despite his deep sympathy for the folk. Winesburg, Ohio (1919) is a series of grotesques depicting the repressed lives of the inhabitants, their inhibitions and follies. The characters attempt to rise above their state of decrepitude but soon sink back to their former passiveness, Tar; a Midwest Childhood (1926) is introspective auto-biography and presents the coarse psychology, manners and customs, personalities, and view of life to be found in a middle-western town. Anderson himself admits he has not found his "thing to love" and the result of "frustrated lovers and confused children" does not appear to be completely illuminating of any mode of life.

Sinclair Lewis continued the work begun by Anderson, in Main Street (1920) and Babbitt (1922). The former is an attack on the average American town; its dullness, lack of culture and passive content. Babbitt satirizes the American business man, and shows his weakness for conventionality. Yet like Anderson, Lewis has permitted his personal life

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business man, and shows his weakness for conventionalism.
Yet like Anderson, Lewis has permitted his personal life

with his intense hatred for the small town to flavor his writings. His novels are satiric and must necessarily be exaggerated. As a result, the picture of the small town is not objective or realistic.

William Allen White, "defender of the village", presents a story of youth against a democratic village background in At the Court of Bayville (1899). A Certain Rich Man (1906) shows that same democratic village being destroyed by economic greed. In Our Town (1906) is the inside story of the town newspaper, with its insight into the friendly spirit of the town. White's abounding faith in the essential goodness of man is seen in In The Heart of a Fool (1918). This novel traces the growth of a democratic Harvey with its kindly spirit to a city of avarice and greed. William Allen White is a staunch defender of village ways, but would keep his village stagnant at the end of the 19th century. His love for the village admits no change or progress and in the end serves only to stunt that which he would foster.

Booth Tarkington, like White, presents a picture of the American village as seen through "rosy-colored glasses". But despite his lenient point of view, he has done much toward lifting the despairingly gloomy veil from the fiction of the Middle West. The Gentleman from Indiana (1899) is an expression of the "good dear people" to be found in the mid-western small town. The Turmoil (1915) and The Magnificent

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Ambersons (1918) indicate the pressure put upon the democratic and friendly village by the on-coming rush of aggressive industrialism with its greed and avarice. Alice Adams (1921) goes through the successive stages of almost any girl who seeks in vain for a rich husband. In the end she realizes the beauty and the good life to be had in the middle-class social level of the town. The Midlander (1924) depicts the mid-western town as a place of dignified spaciousness as compared with the squeezed brownstone fronts of New York City and its equally squeezed and purposeless living.

Anderson and Lewis were vituperative against the village of fiction for its dullness and repression ; White and Tarkington reached the other extreme of presenting a picture of " good dear folk " and complete happiness and innocence. But Dorothy Canfield Fisher took the middle ground - and in the last analysis -, a stand which will prove most realistic of all. She has given us a picture of the good to be found in a small town but she has not at all closed her eyes to the faults found there too. Hillsboro People (1915) is a group of stories whose characters are compelling, not only for their virtues, but also for their very human failings. Rough Hewn (1922) shows the powerful attraction of a Vermont town with its " folksy ways " even after a number of years in the exciting cities of Europe. The Brimming Cup (1920) and The Deepening Stream (1930) tell of the benefits of bringing up children in the right atmosphere of village life.

Anderson (1918) indicates the pressure put upon the domestic and friendly village of the on-coming rush of aggressive individualism with its greed and avarice. Alice Adams (1921) goes through the successive stages of almost any girl who seeks in vain for a rich husband. In the end she realizes the beauty and the good life to be had in the middle-class social level of the town. The Wanderer (1924) depicts the mid-western town as a place of dignified spaciousness as compared with the squeezed prosperous towns of New York City and its equally squeezed and purposeless living.

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That the "small town" is not for everyone is true, but the reputation of the small town of fiction will depend in large part upon the novels just discussed. And of these novels, Mrs. Fisher's are obviously the most characteristic of true village life. Her careful avoidance of either attack or defense makes her its most promising support. Admitting its failings, she shows that fullness in living does not depend upon "citified conveniences", but upon friendly ways, helpfulness, and dependability. The small town of fiction will probably maintain a reputation of being just halfway between the beautiful Emporia, Kansas, and hideous Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, as is everything good in this life.

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